

# BREAKING INTO THE BIG LEAGUE

## PART I.

As Narrated to BOZEMAN BULGER

THIS is my own story, and I will tell it in my own way. While I am not a professional writer, I have a good college education, and can wear evening clothes without spiking myself. That is a big satisfaction to me personally; but I am beginning to believe that it doesn't amount to a great deal in baseball. The fellow who goes after a fly ball and yells "I got it!" is just as likely to hold it as the more polished athlete who cries "I have it!"

Still, our manager, who is famous throughout the country for his analytical mind, says that the college man has an advantage over the town-lot player because he has a more systematic way of thinking. This great baseball general declares that a college player usually tries to find his weakness; while the more uncouth athlete usually tries to hide his.

I am trying very hard to make good as a professional ball player, and it is likely that many of you who read this will see me in a big league uniform before the summer is over. You will probably size me up and ask your companion, "Who is that Busher?" Before you pass final judgment on me, however, I wish you would remember the trials and vicissitudes that I describe in this article. They come to all who attempt to make the big league, whether from the colleges or the town lot. Education in itself gives one no preference on the field. The force of muscle and commonsense wipes out all class distinction. The Busher who gets to the top does so on his ball-playing merits and not on his manners.

You will notice that I frequently use the word "Busher." I do so because I have learned that it is more expressive than any word in the English language. The words "Cub" and "Recruit" do not convey the same meaning to a ball player as "Busher." They use it to express their impressions of men in other walks of life. For instance, an inexperienced reporter who follows a club for the first time is called a "busher," while an oldtimer is referred to as being "up there" or a "big league writer." The latter expression does not mean to imply that he merely writes about the big league. It means that he has reached the top of his profession. Actors are also referred to as big leaguers and bushers. The word "busher" is derived from the fact that most of the youngsters start in the bush league, or "way down in the sticks" where they are never heard of.

BUT I must start at the beginning

When I was a youth in my long first trousers my mother always said that I was to be her preacher; while my father insisted that I was to be the lawyer of the family. You will have to decide which of them missed it the farther. When I was seventeen I was sent to college. I had played ball on the small school teams around home, and I discovered after I had been in college for a few months that I was a better pitcher than nine out of ten of the boys who were trying to make the team. I was strong and husky, and at the age of eighteen was over six feet in height and measured forty-one inches in the chest. Naturally I was ambitious to make the team, because it would give me a certain amount of prestige in college and would also enable me to join the Greek letter society where all the college leaders lived. My greatest ambition at that time was to have my photograph hung up in the trophy room with the great heroes of the football and field teams. When the call was sent out for candidates for the team, I reported at the cage with the other young fellows and listened to a long talk from the head coach. Old Professor Dingley was also there, and he gave us some points on the philosophy of athletics.

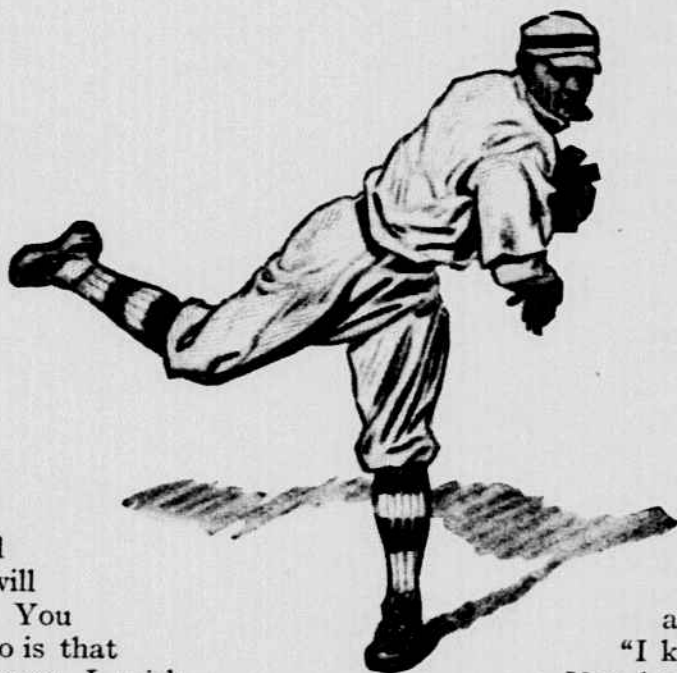
"Now, Boys," said the coach, "get in here and show us what you can do. You will also remember that there must be no cigarette smoking and that you must eat at the training table. Unless you do exactly as you are told, you will be dropped from the team. Here, you," he said addressing me, "show me what you can put on a baseball!"

I stepped out in the cage and began to shoot over every curve that I possessed.

"Fine!" he would say occasionally, and then would start another pitcher.

In a few minutes my arm was very tired; but I was afraid to tell him about it. That night the muscles were so stiff that I could not lift my arm from my side. I told my roommate about it, and we worked for two hours bathing it in hot water.

I mention these things because a little later on I am going to show you how they do the first day's work in the big league. That open-



ing workout came very near ruining me for the season. My arm was sore for a month, and every curve that I pitched would cause me excruciating pain.

"Remember, though," said old Professor Dingley to me one day, "an athlete must have fortitude and stick to his work. That shows that he has the right stuff in him."

That made me more ambitious, and I kept plugging away until I had what ball players call an arm of glass. I lost control and began to get very nervous.

Things were getting worse for me every day, and I began to lose weight. I felt that I should never make the team.

ONE day as I was coming out of the gymnasium a tough little red-haired fellow who had been employed as an assistant rubber touched me on the arm.

"Ouch!" I cried in pain. "Don't do that! My arm is as sore as a boil."

"I know it is," he said. "And that's what I headed you off for. You know any regular ball players?" he asked.

I told him that I did not, and he thereupon declared that he was going to "put me wise."

"You are all right, Steve," he said—though my name is not Steve. "And if you'll give me a tumble, I'll get you on that team. These guys have got the wrong dope on you."

"What guys?" I asked a little testily.

"Why, these guys who are running this team. They ain't onto their job. I used to rub for big league teams, and I know something. If I'd give you the right steer on how to make this team would you fall for it?"

"Go on and tell me," I replied. His rough manner was very convincing.

"Now, listen," he said. "You've got to take a chance; but that's the only way to win. You'll be a bum if you keep going like you are now. The thing to do is to slip one over on these guys, and still not let them know that you are doing it."

"What do you mean?" I asked a little curiously as I began putting on my sliding pads.

"Can you butt into that gang of students that's goin' out with that engineerin' prof. for a month?"

"Yes," I replied. "He spoke to me about it. But that would keep me away from the training cage."

"That's just exactly the place that you want to duck," he replied. "Now, listen. You take that trip if you can, and don't you touch a baseball for a month. When you get back here you'll be just right and fresh, and I'll bet you can go in and clean up. Your arm is too sore now to use it at all. Get me?"

That did give me a line of thought, and I went home that night and talked it over with my roommate. I finally decided to take Red's advice.

THE next morning I went to the engineering professor and asked to be taken along with the class that was going out West for practical instruction.

"Won't they miss you on the ball team?" he inquired.

"Yes," I replied, and I blushed upon realizing that I was practising deception; "but I believe I need the engineering knowledge more than anything right now."

"All right," he declared, "I will take you, and I want to say that I admire your act of sacrificing a chance to make the team for a knowledge of engineering."

When I told the coach what I was going to do he was keenly disappointed, and he almost intimated that I was lacking in courage, or, rather, that I was a quitter.

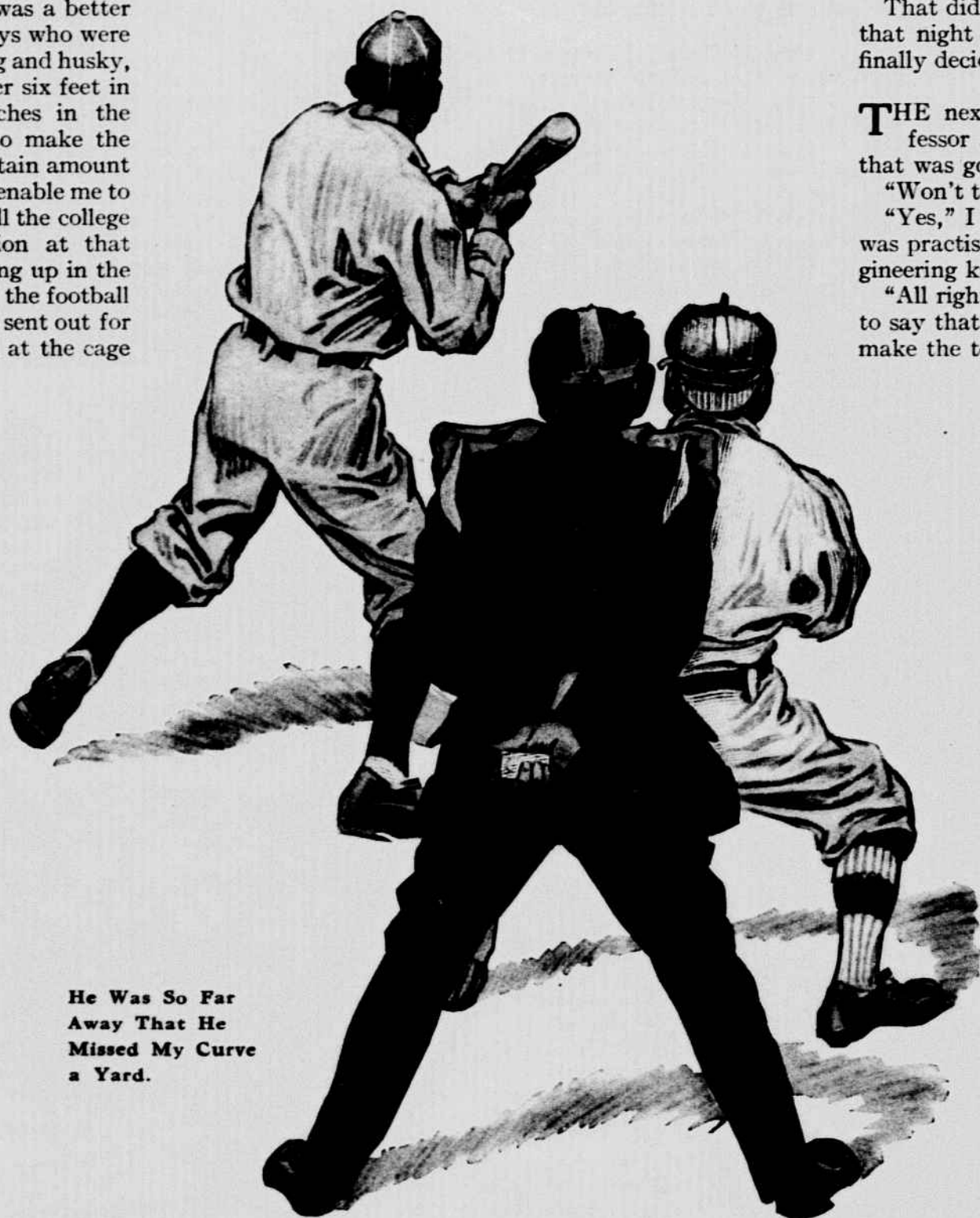
"I'll get back in time to be of considerable help to you," I replied. "You may find a place for me yet."

"Well, I don't know how you are going to do it," he observed, "unless you keep working that arm."

The other players looked at me with a touch of scorn when they heard what I was going to do; but as they talked someone remarked that three of the pitchers were suffering from sore arms.

As I packed up my things and walked out of the clubhouse that day my mind was besieged with conflicting thoughts, and I was very unhappy. In other words, as I learned later to express it, I was "all shot to pieces." I felt that I was doing the right thing. "How is it," I said to myself, "that I will take the advice of a little red-haired rubber instead of the professors and coaches?" But, somehow, what he had said had hit me with a great deal of force. I felt inwardly that he had more practical knowledge of what was needed than did the head coach. Anyway, I had taken the chance, and I was going through with it. Hereafter it was to be the red-haired rubber against the men of education. He had seen men train who played ball for a living, and in my youthful way I figured that they knew.

As I took that unhappy walk to my



He Was So Far Away That He Missed My Curve a Yard.